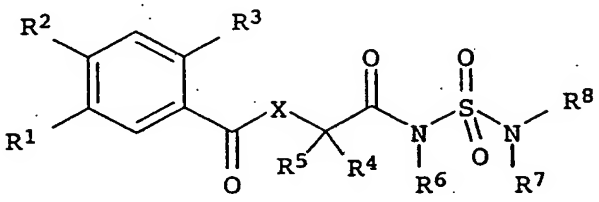
We claim:

1. A 3-heterocyclyl-substituted benzoic acid derivative of the formula I

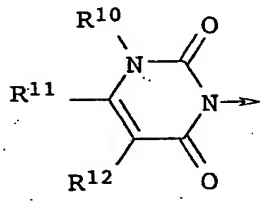


(I)

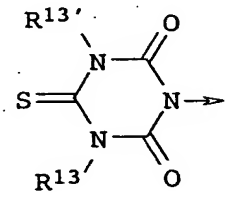
where:

X is oxygen or NR^9,

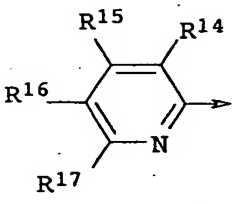
R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formulae II-A to II-H,



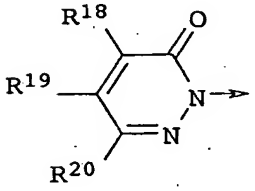
(II-A)



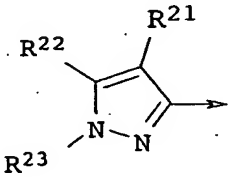
(II-B)



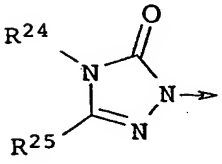
(II-C)



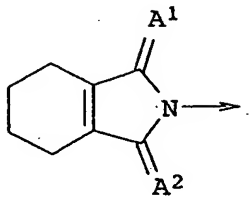
(II-D)



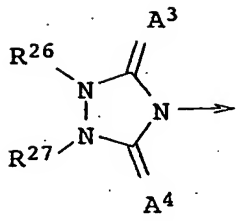
(II-E)



(II-F)



(II-G)



(II-H)

R^2 is hydrogen or halogen,

R^3 is halogen or cyano,

R^4, R^5 independently of one another are hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-alkoxy, or R^4 and R^5 together are a group $=CH_2$,

R^6 is hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-alkoxy,

R^7, R^8 independently of one another are hydrogen, C_1-C_6-alkyl, C_3-C_6-alkenyl, C_3-C_6-alkynyl, C_1-C_4-haloalkyl, C_1-C_4-alkoxy-C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylthio-C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylsulfinyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, cyano-C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-alkoxycarbonyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, amino-C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylamino-C_1-C_4-alkyl, di(C_1-C_4-alkyl)amino-C_1-C_4-alkyl, aminocarbonyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, (C_1-C_4-alkylamino)carbonyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, di(C_1-C_4-alkyl)aminocarbonyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, phenyl or C_1-C_4-alkylphenyl or

R^7 and R^8 together with the nitrogen atom to which they are attached form a saturated or unsaturated 3-, 4-, 5-, 6- or 7-membered nitrogen heterocycle which may optionally contain one or two further heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of nitrogen, sulfur and oxygen as ring members, which may contain 1 or 2 carbonyl and/or thiocarbonyl groups as ring members and/or which may be substituted by one, two or three substituents selected from the group consisting of C_1-C_4-alkyl and halogen,

R^9 is hydrogen, hydroxyl, C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-alkoxy, phenyl, phenyl-C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_3-C_6-alkenyl or C_3-C_6-alkynyl,

R^{10} is hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or amino,

R^{11} is C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-haloalkyl,

R^{12} is hydrogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,

R^{13}, $R^{13'}$ independently of one another are hydrogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,

R^{14} is halogen,
R^{15} is hydrogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,
R^{16} is C_1-C_4-haloalkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylthio, C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl or C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyloxy,
R^{17} is hydrogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,

R^{18} is hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or amino,
R^{19} is C_1-C_4-haloalkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylthio or C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl,
R^{20} is hydrogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,

R^{21} is hydrogen, halogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,
R^{22} is C_1-C_4-alkyl, C_1-C_4-haloalkyl, C_1-C_4-haloalkoxy, C_1-C_4-alkylthio or C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl,
R^{23} is hydrogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl,
or
R^{22} and R^{23} together with the atoms to which they are attached form a 5-, 6- or 7-membered saturated or unsaturated ring which may contain a heteroatom selected from the group consisting of oxygen and nitrogen as a ring-forming atom and/or which may be substituted by one, two or three radicals selected from the group consisting of C_1-C_4-alkyl and halogen,

R^{24} is hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-haloalkyl,
R^{25} is C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-haloalkyl,
or
R^{24} and R^{25} together with the atoms to which they are attached form a 5-, 6- or 7-membered saturated or unsaturated ring which optionally contains an oxygen atom as ring-forming atom and/or which may be substituted by one, two or three radicals selected from the group consisting of C_1-C_4-alkyl and halogen,

R^{26} is hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-haloalkyl,
R^{27} is hydrogen, C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-haloalkyl,
or
R^{26} and R^{27} together with the atoms to which they are attached form a 5-, 6- or 7-membered saturated or unsaturated ring which optionally contains an oxygen atom as ring-forming atom and/or which may be substituted by one, two or three

radicals selected from the group consisting of C_1-C_4-alkyl and halogen,

A^1, A^2, A^3, A^4 are each independently of one another oxygen or sulfur,

and its agriculturally useful salts.

2. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in claim 1 where R^2 is fluorine, chlorine or hydrogen.

3. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in claim 1 or 2 where R^3 is chlorine or cyano.

4. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of the preceding claims where X is oxygen.

5. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of the preceding claims where R^6 is hydrogen.

6. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-A in which R^{10} is C_1-C_4-alkyl or amino, R^{11} is C_1-C_4-haloalkyl and R^{12} is hydrogen.

7. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-B in which R^{13} and $R^{13'}$ are each independently of one another C_1-C_4-alkyl.

8. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-C in which R^{14} is fluorine or chlorine, R^{15} is hydrogen and R^{16} is C_1-C_4-haloalkyl, C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl or C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyloxy.

9. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-D in which R^{18} is hydrogen, methyl or amino, R^{19} is C_1-C_4-haloalkyl or C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl and R^{20} is hydrogen.

10. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-E in which R^{21} is halogen or C_1-C_4-alkyl, R^{22} is C_1-C_4-haloalkyl, C_1-C_4-haloalkoxy or C_1-C_4-alkylsulfonyl and R^{23} is C_1-C_4-alkyl.

11. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-F in which R^{24} is hydrogen, methyl, difluoromethyl or trifluoromethyl, R^{25} is methyl or trifluoromethyl or R^{24} together with R^{25} are a chain of the formula $-(CH_2)_4-$.

12. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-G in which A^1 and A^2 are each oxygen.

13. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 where R^1 is a heterocyclic radical of the formula II-H in which R^{26} and R^{27} are each independently of one another C_1-C_4-alkyl or C_1-C_4-haloalkyl or R^{26} together with R^{27} are a chain of the formulae $-CH_2-O-(CH_2)_2-$ or $-(CH_2)_4-$.

14. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 13 where
R^2 is hydrogen, chlorine or fluorine,
R^3 is chlorine or cyano,
R^6 is hydrogen and
X is oxygen.

15. A benzoic acid derivative as claimed in any of claims 1 to 14 where R^4 or R^5 is hydrogen and the other radical R^4 or R^5 is C_1-C_4-alkyl or R^4, R^5 are each methyl.

16. A composition comprising a herbicidally effective amount of at least one 3-heterocyclyl-substituted benzoic acid derivative of the formula I or an agriculturally useful salt of I as claimed in any of claims 1 to 15 and at least one inert liquid and/or solid carrier and, if desired, at least one surfactant.

17. A composition for the desiccation/defoliation of plants, comprising an amount of at least one 3-heterocyclyl-substituted benzoic acid derivative of the formula I or an agriculturally useful salt of I as claimed in any of claims 1 to 15 which acts as a desiccant/defoliant and at least one inert liquid and/or solid carrier and, if desired, at least one surfactant.

18. A method for controlling unwanted vegetation, which comprises allowing a herbicidally effective amount of at least one 3-heterocyclyl-substituted benzoic acid derivative of the formula I or an agriculturally useful salt of I as claimed in

any of claims 1 to 15 to act on plants, their habitat and/or on seed.

19. A method for the desiccation/defoliation of plants, which comprises allowing an amount which is effective as a desiccant/defoliant of at least one 3-heterocyclyl-substituted benzoic acid derivative of the formula I or an agriculturally useful salt of I as claimed in any of claims 1 to 15 to act on plants.

20. The use of 3-heterocyclyl-substituted benzoic acid derivatives of the formula I or their agriculturally useful salts as claimed in any of claims 1 to 15 as herbicides or for the desiccation/defoliation of plants.